Charge to the President
from John Buchanan, Pastor, Fourth Presbyterian Church

It is something of a cliché among those of us who hang around institutions such as this that being a president of a college or seminary is pretty much an "impossible task." The diversity of the constituencies one has to accommodate and listen to patiently, if not satisfy, rivals that of the Mayor of Chicago or President of the United States and certainly exceeds that of a corporate CEO whose task, after all, is stunningly simple--compared to yours, Cynthia.

Here, however, a single day's schedule includes meeting with a diversity of people: students, faculty, administrators, trustees, a group so disparate that a theological seminary is the only place on the earth that they have a chance of actually being in the same room together.

And so, I begin my charge to you, Cynthia, by posing the question of why in the world you, or anyone for that matter, would want the job?

Unless, of course, you love it--love the diversity--love the challenge--love the high demand, high energy environment that will send you home at night knowing that you've been to work. Unless you love the sense that whatever the future of the church of Jesus Christ will be in this culture, what happens in theological education will be at the very heart of it.

E. B. White said somewhere that the nice thing about having a religion is that you don't have to decide what to do with your day when you get up in the morning.

My charge to you, Cynthia, is informed by my sense that you loved this job before it claimed you and you claimed it; that you love theological education; that you love the church and its ministry. My task is easy because I know your love is going to make this relationship very creative and interesting.

Lead us, Cynthia. Lead McCormick Theological Seminary. There is, of course, voluminous literature on the subject of leadership these days, and a consensus that we are in a kind of leadership crisis in the culture, the body politic, and the church.

What is it? What does it mean to lead? It means at least these two things.

Vision. Help us have a vision for theological education in the future. Leadership means having a vision and articulating the vision, over and over. So lead us to a new vision, not merely a recycled vision of this seminary's distinguished past. We know that. It is important. It is not recoverable. It is not a good idea to try. Salute it, Cynthia, and then lead us with a new vision of what McCormick Theological Seminary can be.

Change. Lyle Schaller (1993, 10), everybody's favorite church consultant, says something remarkable in the introduction to a recent book: "What is the number one issue facing Christian organizations on the North American continent? Dwindling numbers? Money? Social justice? Leadership? Television? Sexuality? This observer, after three decades of observing and studying, places a one sentence issue at the top of that list--the need to initiate and implement planned change from within."

"Initiate and implement change."

Max DePree is the chair of a remarkably successful company who has some different and creative ideas about management. Everybody is reading his books, *Leadership is an Art* and *Leadership Jazz*, including President Clinton. So, in case you think one preacher quoting another lacks credibility, let me bring the corporate CEO to the conversation. DePree (1992, 31) writes, "Leaders are accountable for the continuous renewal of the organization. Renewal requires that leaders be alive in a special way to innovation and be hospitable to the creative person."

Lead us, Cynthia. And as you are leading, help us wrestle what I think is the biggest question of all for a theological seminary, namely the relationship between academic pursuit and religious faith.

In a recent *Christian Century*, Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass (1995) review George Marsden's new book, *The Soul of the American University*. They focus on the relationship between academic freedom and the confessional tradition. That discussion, they say, has to do with "the position of intellectual life within the church." When there is an estrangement between the life of the mind and the heart of faith, theology becomes an academic specialty, with first-rate theology being written, not for the church, but for academic readers. When that estrangement happens, there occurs in the church what Schwehn and Bass (1995, 294) call "intellectual tribalism" of the left and right in which people forget "that the Christian life requires hard thinking."

That comes perilously close to describing the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). I love something Ed Farley (1990, 52) said about us: the Presbyterian genius is not a body of theological truth but a way of asking questions about truth.

We look to our theological seminaries, we look to you, Cynthia, to help us think our way into the future.

Lead us. Help us think about God and our lives. And take care of yourself, all of you: your body, your mind, your heart. We shouldn't even have to say these things to one another in the midst of a sophisticated occasion like this!

But we do because the call of Jesus Christ to give our lives away sometimes results in our giving so much, indiscriminately and thoughtlessly, that there isn't much left to give when and where it counts.

So take walks, or bike rides, or whatever makes your heart beat faster. . . and read books because you love to and your heart will be happier. . . and pray and meditate and reflect on this job and your life and God and how they are intersecting for you. . . and enjoy the Chicago Symphony, the Art Institute, and the Bulls. And although you are a natural South Sider, enjoy the Cubs, even if that is an oxymoron. (Saying this isn't entirely necessary, for I know you to be shamelessly assertive about asking for baseball tickets!) And sometimes, Cynthia, regularly, in fact, do nothing--no-thing--but be God's child.

And finally, live out your life on whatever terms you and God establish. In her fine little book, *The Writing Life*, Annie Dillard (1989, 78-79) advises would-be writers not to hoard ideas, not to try to save material for another book, another essay, another day. Instead, she advises, write it all down, shoot it all, invest it, give it away, empty it out. These things, she says, fill from the bottom, like well water.

Give your life, Cynthia, and the promise of Jesus is that your life will be given back to you.

In his journal on May 6, 1854, Thoreau wrote:
all that a [woman] has to say or do that can possibly concern [humankind] is in some shape or another to tell the story of [her] love, to sing, and if [she] is fortunate enough and keeps alive, she will be forever in love.

God bless you, Cynthia. Please do know how delighted we are to be here today; how very proud we are of you and how very much we look forward to the adventure which now lies ahead. God bless you. God bless us all--on our way.

DePree, M. 1992. *Leadership Jazz.* New York: Dell.

Dillard, A. 1989. *The Writing Life.* New York: Harper and Row.

Farley, E. 1990. "The Presbyterian heritage as modernism." In *The Presbyterian Predicament*, edited by M. Coalter, J. Mulder, and L. Weeks. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.

Schaller, L. 1993. *Strategies for Change.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Schwehn, M., and D. Bass. 1995. Christianity and academic soul-searching. *The Christian Century* 112, no. 9, 292-95.